

Congressman Also Reads Book on Healthy Eating to First Grade Class as part of Read Across America Day

Binghamton, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today visited Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Binghamton, New York to highlight the effectiveness of the Binghamton City School District's (BCSD) nutritious school breakfast and lunch program and to announce his legislative efforts to replicate the food programs nationwide. Additionally, Hinchey read a book on healthy eating to a first grade class at the school as part of Read Across America Day - a national program designed to focus the country's attention on the importance of motivating children to read.

"In a day and age when fast food is cheap, quick and easy, the programs at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School are making nutritious meals, which are a much smarter choice, just as accessible to all of its students. Children will perform much better at school when they are not hungry and receive the proper nutrition they need to learn and grow into healthy young adults," Hinchey said. "I am very pleased that Binghamton City School District is leading the way nationally by implementing a very strong nutrition program and I look forward to expanding and replicating this effort both here in New York and across the country. As a member of the subcommittee in Congress that funds nutrition programs, I will make sure my colleagues are aware of the great success already being achieved here in Binghamton."

Each school day, more than 1,800 children eat a healthy breakfast at Binghamton's schools. The school district began a pilot program at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School that will soon result in every student being provided a nutritious breakfast in the classroom. Hinchey is seeking to expand that universal breakfast program to many more schools in the state and country. Additionally, more than 4,000 children eat school lunch in Binghamton schools. With almost 65 percent of the district's children eligible to eat free or reduced-price school meals, school lunches provide some of the best nutrition for students to grow, learn, and play.

During his visit to the school, Hinchey highlighted two pieces of legislation he is working to move through the House that will help ensure children throughout New York and the country have access to nutritious meals throughout the day at school as well as in after school programs. Hinchey is cosponsoring the Universal Classroom Breakfast Expansion Act, which Congressman Paul Tonko (D-NY) authored. The bill provides funding to expand universal classroom breakfast programs across the country. Universal classroom breakfast programs have shown to dramatically increase participation in the breakfast program by the most

vulnerable students. Schools participating in these programs provide breakfast free of charge to all students and serve breakfast right in the students' classrooms, after the bell has rung.

Traditional school breakfast is served in the cafeteria before school starts, which means that students need to make it to school early enough to get to the cafeteria and eat before the bell. This system leaves too many kids behind, as bus schedules, security lines, and the desire to socialize keep many students from getting to the cafeteria before the start of instruction time. Universal classroom breakfast programs make breakfast a classroom activity and ensure that all students have the opportunity to eat a healthy breakfast together regardless of family income level. Schools that have already started universal classroom breakfast programs have reported decreases in disciplinary referrals, trips to the nurse's office, absenteeism and tardiness.

Hinchey is also cosponsoring Tonko's Access to Nutritious Meals for Young Children Act of 2009. This bill would provide much-needed resources for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) to expand young children's access to healthy meals through child care centers, homes, and Head Start programs. The reforms in this bill will improve child nutrition and health, reduce obesity, enhance child development and school readiness, reduce hunger, and make healthier meals more affordable. The bill would raise reimbursement rates by 20 cents per meal and 10 cents per snack and require reimbursement for a third meal or snack. Many children are in child care for at least eight hours a day and require more than two meals and a snack.

"These measures will help millions of children across the country gain access to nutritious meals during and after school so they never have to go hungry," Hinchey said. "Good nutrition and healthy eating habits play a fundamental role in the overall health of children. I will continue to do all that I can to replicate the good work being done here in Binghamton in order to ensure that our children are receiving the proper nutrients that they need to develop in a healthy way."

The BCSD elementary schools were honored January 20, 2010 for achieving Gold Level status in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) HealthierUS Schools Challenge. Only two other school districts in New York State earned the honor. The HealthierUS Schools Challenge program was established to recognize schools that are creating healthier environments through their promotion of good nutrition and physical activity. To achieve Gold Level status, BCSD schools met, among other things, the following requirements: offering reimbursable lunches that demonstrate healthy menu planning practices and principles of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, providing nutrition education to students, maintaining an average daily participation of 70 percent or higher for reimbursable lunches, and adhering to the guidelines established by the Food and Nutrition Services for foods served and sold in schools

outside of the National School Lunch Program.

The BCSD participates in three federal programs for healthy eating: 1) National School Lunch Program (NSLP), ensures that all children have access to lunch at school and school districts can serve a high quality meal with more whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables. The Binghamton program received \$1.4 million in federal support last year plus \$20,000 from the federal economic recovery program; 2) School Breakfast Program (SBP): Recently, Woodrow Wilson Elementary started breakfast in the classroom, a creative and unique way in which all students have access to breakfast. Hot items such as egg sandwiches or cold items such as low-fat milk and cereal are delivered to the classrooms. The Binghamton program received \$476,000 in federal funding last year; and 3) Summer Food Service Program (SFSP): Binghamton City Schools is one of the dozens of sponsors in the congressional district Hinchey represents that provide free meals to children in low-income neighborhoods. At over 23 neighborhood locations such as schools, youth centers, and boys and girls clubs, the school district is making sure that children do not go hungry even when school is out. Hinchey has previously introduced legislation to expand the Simplified Summer Food Program nationwide.

The National Education Association (NEA) annually sponsors Read Across America Day. Now in its 13th year, NEA's Read Across America focuses the country's attention on how important it is to motivate children to read in addition to helping them master basic skills. This nationwide reading celebration takes place each year on or around March 2 -- the birthday of beloved children's author Dr. Seuss, who epitomizes the love of learning. Dr. Seuss's use of rhyme makes his books an effective tool for teaching young children the basic skills they need to be successful.